



# Tou<sup>h</sup>ching

Where touching begins, there love and humanity also begin-  
within the first minutes following birth.”

Ashley Montague

“We in the Western world are beginning to discover our neglected senses. This growing awareness repre-

sents something of an overdue insurgency against the painful deprivation of sensory experience we have suffered in our technologized world. The ability of Western man to relate to his fellowman has lagged far behind his ability to relate to consumer goods and the unnecessary necessities which hold him in thrall-possessed by his possessions. He can reach out to other planets. but too often he cannot reach out to his fellowman. His personal frontiers seldom, if at all, permit the passage of a deeply felt communication across them. The human dimension is constricted and constrained. Through what other media, indeed, than our senses can we enter into that healthy tissue of human contacts, the universe of human existence. We seem to be unaware that it is our senses that frame the body of our reality.

**To shut off anyone of the senses** is to (reduce the dimensions of our reality, and to the extent that occurs we lose touch with it; we become imprisoned in a world of impersonal words, sans touch, sans taste, sans flavor. The one-dimensionality of the word becomes a substitute for the richness of the multidimensionality of the senses, and our world grows crass, flat, and arid in consequence. Words tend to take the place of experience. Words become a declarative statement rather than a demonstrative involvement, something one can utter in words, rather than act out in a personal sensory relationship.

Above all else, it seems to me that is our role as human beings always to join learning to loving-kindness. Learning to learn, learning to love, and to be kind are so closely interconnected and so profoundly interwoven, especially with, the sense of touch, it would greatly help toward our rehumanization if: we would pay closer attention to the need we all have for tactual experience.

**The impersonality of life in the Western world** has become such that we have produced a race of untouchables. We have become strangers to each other, not only avoiding but even warding off all forms of "unnecessary" physical contact, faceless figures in a crowded landscape, lonely and afraid of intimacy. To the extent that this is so, we are all diminished. Because of our untouchableness we have failed to create a society in which people touch each other in more senses than the physical. With our inauthentic selves, and wearing other people's image of what we should be, it is not surprising that we remain unsure of who we really

are. We wear the inauthentic selves that have been imposed upon us as uncomfortably as an ill-fitting garment, ruefully, at times, and unknowing, wondering how we got this way. As Willy Loman says in *Death of a Salesman*, "I still feel kind of temporary."

The world of Western man has come to rely heavily for communication on the "distance senses," sight and hearing, and of the "proximity senses," taste, smell, and touch, has largely tabooed the latter. Two dogs may use all five senses in their communication with one another, but the same can hard-

ly be said of two human beings in our culture. With our increasing sophistication and disengagement from each other, we have come to rely excessively on verbal communication, to the extent of virtually excluding the universe of nonverbal communication from our experience to our great impoverishment. The languages of the senses, in which all of us can be socialized, are capable of enlarging our appreciation and of deepening our understanding of each other and the world in which we live. Chief among these languages is touching. The communications we transmit through touch constitute the most powerful means of establishing human relationships, the foundation of experience.

